

Faith

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Have you any idea what faith really is? For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

Faith is something I do; it is an exercise of my consciousness. Faith is the noun that refers to the action, and believing is the verb. I say I believe when I mean that I accept the Word of God as true. You can believe a lot of things that are not in the Bible. You can believe just in everyday life all kinds of things in which you put your trust: but when we speak about saving faith, what it is that saves the soul, we mean that we accept the Word of God as true.

There are two common usages of the word "faith." One of them is in what we would call a cognitional series. Now that may be a word that you do not ordinarily use, but what we mean is that you are talking about things that you believe are true facts. The other use of the word is in the volitional series when you talk about what you are going to do. Let me illustrate it to you. The first use that I have called cognitional is, for example, "I believe that white tablet is aspirin." Now it is not printed on the tablet, but I believe it is. The second use of the word "believe" that I have called a volitional series is when I would say, "I believe aspirin is good for a cold." Now I used the word "believe" each time. In the first place I said, "I believe that white tablet is an aspirin." Maybe it is and maybe it is not, but it could be tested. It could be verified. I have faith about it. I believe that sack has four pounds of sugar. You could put it on the scales and find out. I believe it is five miles to town. You could get in a car and watch the speedometer and see. The other is, "I believe aspirin is good for a cold. That is the reason I take it." It could be tested in an experiment. You can take the aspirin and find out if it cures your cold. Someone else will say, "I took it, and it was good for me." It may be that someone will say, "I took it and it did not help me any," and then you will have to make your judgment on the people who talked about it. One is "faith about" and the other is "faith in."

Now in order to believe anything, something must have been said. We read Paul's word, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith to believe for the saving of the soul is taking God at His Word. It is not just believing that the Bible is the Word of God, but it is believing that what the Bible says is for me; and I am going to act on it.

The Bible has a record of history of events and persons that reveal the will of God. That history reveals the will of God. As I read that history in the Bible I get ideas. Out of these ideas I recognize certain promises that God makes. Now when I accept that promise as for me, I am believing the Gospel. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is believing in Someone who is to me now invisible. It is oftentimes difficult for me to be sure that I actually do believe in Him. I can always check up by reading the Scriptures. If, when I read the Bible, I find that I am expecting God to do what He said He would do, then I can be sure I believe the Gospel.

Chapter 2

Can you see that when I have faith, I commit myself?

Faith involves commitment. Believing is like swallowing. Just as we swallow food in order to nourish our body, so we believe the promises of God in order to nourish our souls. You know even in our own language that connection is oftentimes felt when someone tells a tale of what he has done or where he has been, and it sounds improbable to us. Perhaps we just do not think it can be true. Have you ever noticed how in talking to someone else who also heard the story, you could ask that other person, "Did you swallow that?" You know what you mean by that. Did you take it to be true? That is what you do when you believe.

Swallowing alone, however, will not be enough. When you say that a person lives by swallowing food, that is true. If you were to say a person lives by swallowing, you have not said enough, because every starving person swallows. The reason he starves is because there is nothing to swallow. However, the actual experience of swallowing can be going on. So it is with believing.

When people say that they do not believe, they mean they do not believe God. Actually they believe all around about them everyday. They believe in a chair when they sit on it. They believe in a car when they get in it to ride. They believe in anything and everything around about them. There are many things they do not know, but they believe in them. When a person says, "I just do not have faith. I just do not believe," he means, "I do not have faith in God; I do not believe in God." When you talk about swallowing, it is swallowing food that nourishes the body.

When I believe in anything or when I believe in anybody, I have committed myself to be involved with that thing or with that person. You see when I swallow what I thought was food, I am in for it. I took it into me and now I am involved. So when I say, "I believe in such and such a person," then I am in for whatever he stands for and whatever he amounts to. If he does not stand for anything, does not belong to anything, I am just at a loss. I just swallowed the wrong thing. When I say, "I believe in aspirin," that means I take it; and I take the consequences. I swallow something, and that means I am in for it. Of course we have doctors who can help us and so on, but taking things naturally that is the way it is.

I often think faith can be seen in the marriage vows. At the wedding you heard the girl say, "I do." She committed herself to everything that is involved in being married. It would be a good thing for us to consider this fact. Could I be committed to anything in ignorance? Yes, it is like signing a contract. If you sign a contract the whole contract is valid whether you read it or not. Even if I did not read that fine print it is still true. Or it is like coming to a fork in a highway. If I go to the right or to the left I am committed to that way. If it leads to peril it is mine, and if it leads to safety it is mine. Faith involves commitment. When I believe the promises of God in the Bible, I am committed to what those promises do for me.

Chapter 3

Do you realize that faith can be wrong?

Let no man deceive you by any means (II Thessalonians 2:3).

I could have faith that a certain liquid that I have in a glass is milk and drink it. It could turn out to be strychnine. My believing it did not make it milk. Some years ago there was a very sad tragedy in a hospital. A nurse was preparing food for newborn babies that were in the hospital. She thought a certain preparation was a formula for food for the babies to have. She did not know that it was detergent. She put it in the food and gave it to the babies quite honestly, sincerely. She thought it was food, but eight of the babies died. That was a sad tragedy. Actually the nurse was not wrong in her intentions. She was perfectly sincere. The babies of course were entirely trusting. They were all innocent of anything. Yet all were wrong and eight babies died.

Spiritually I live by believing the Word of God. I was not there when it was written, but I think it is the Word of God. My believing a specific doctrine that I think the Word of God teaches does not make that doctrine true. It is true that I am committed to it because I think that it is so. I believe it that way, which means that for me I take it to be true.

There is danger in this very thing that I am emphasizing at this point. Believing makes nothing right, just as it makes nothing wrong. Believing actually only commits me to whatever it is that I have in mind. I can swallow poison to my hurt, and so I can believe error to my hurt. Being sincere is no protection. This leads us on to another important truth, and that is that faith needs to be guided.

Chapter 4

Did you know that faith can be guided?

Faith needs to be guided. In the 8th chapter of Acts is the record of the incident when Philip rode in the chariot with the Ethiopian eunuch and guided the Ethiopian in his understanding of the Gospel.

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me (Acts 8:30-31)?

The faith of a believer is a matter of accepting the promises of the Word of God for himself. No one is born with such faith, but we are born with the capacity to believe. When I believe I take something to me, or I take something into me, or I take something for me as mine. If I say I believe in that particular medicine, I mean I am going to take that medicine. But what shall I take? Which road should I choose? Shall I take the medicine? Whom shall I trust? I need guidance.

When it comes to spiritual things it is true that God has revealed His will in His Word. He has revealed what He plans and what He promises to do. But Paul asks:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher (Romans 10:14)?

The Gospel must be heard before you can believe it. The Gospel must be preached before you can believe it. The Gospel is not something a person thinks up for himself; it does not mean that any person who is minded to do good knows the Gospel. It does not mean that anybody who just wants to be right knows the Gospel. No, the Gospel is a message that is based upon certain historic events about Jesus Christ that need to be heard. The Gospel guides the soul into knowing what the promises of God are.

One of the snares that one must avoid in believing is that one must avoid following one's own wishes. Wishful thinking can lure the heart into conceiving that the future as I wish it to be is what it will be. Such thinking is not based on actual facts. We just pointed out in our earlier studies that being sincere is not enough and being honest is not enough. There are sincere people that are wrong, and there are honest people that can go wrong. Actually one has to admit it is being right that counts.

When you come to think about the promises of God, how would you know what they are? You will read them in the Bible. How would you understand what the Bible means? Other Scripture will guide you or someone who knows the Scripture will guide you. If you need help you cannot take every word of Scripture just by itself. Scripture is intended to be taken altogether, and as it is taken as a whole you will come to know the truth. As you know what the Bible says and what is really true in Scripture, you can then move with confidence in believing in God.

Chapter 5

Can you see that faith is helped by the testimony of others?

Faith can be generated by the testimony of others. A person's own faith can be grounded in, and can be started by, what other people will tell him. When the Lord Jesus was dealing with the woman at the well, we read that after the woman had gone back home and told about what had happened to her,

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did (John 4:39).

Why do you go to your doctor? You probably did not go to school with him. You probably do not even know what college he attended. You may not be trained in medicine, so you do not know whether he is doing the right thing or not. Yet you go to that doctor. Why? Because you believe in him. He is the one you chose. But, why did you choose him? You will know that you chose him because one way or another he had been recommended to you, or you had heard what people had said about him. The implication was given to you that he was a good doctor, and finally you committed yourself to him. You did not know everything. But in believing, you do not have to know everything.

Why do you drive your car on that suspension bridge over that canyon? Suppose I need to cross a canyon, and I come to a bridge. I have a proper right to ask, "Will it hold me?" Can I take this car which weighs a ton or more, and put it out there on that suspension bridge? I know nothing of the engineering that is involved and nothing about the weight problem or the tension that the bridge can stand. While I am wondering if I should cross over, suppose that a truck driver with a gravel truck were to come by on the highway and stop and ask me if he could help me. I tell him, "I don't know whether that bridge is safe," and he will say, "Oh, yes, it is safe." I say, "How do you know?" He will tell me that he passes over it with his truck full of gravel every day. Now I have valid grounds to believe intelligently that that bridge will actually hold me.

I see a bottle that has the skull and cross-bones on it and the word "poison." Let us say it has strychnine in it. Do I need to test it? Do I need to take a taste of it to find out whether it is poison or not? No. I can be helped by the testimony of others. Others could tell me, and I could learn the truth from them.

When the Samaritan woman told her neighbors that Jesus of Nazareth could tell her all the things she ever did, and exclaimed this is the Christ, the Messiah, many of them believed on Him because of her word. Later, after they had talked with Him, they came and told her, "Now we believe in Him. Not because of what you said but we have heard Him ourselves." The beginning of this came from hearing other people testify.

This also helps to bring back to our minds the great importance of witnessing. If all the believing people, the folks who are believers, kept quiet, do you know what the result would be? Who would believe? Who in the next generation would believe? If your little children were not taught the things of God, and they were not taught the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, how would they ever know? It is a very simple matter: they would not know if you did not tell them. Some of the neighbors that you have around you never had parents tell them. They never heard the story. Faith can actually be started or generated in the heart and soul by the witnessing of others.

Chapter 6

Can you see why it is important that faith should lead into action?

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead (James 2:20)?

James wrote his epistle to admonish believers to action because the word "faith" is a word that can refer to the believer doing things. Let me illustrate. I may believe the elevator will take me to the tenth floor, but would you recognize the significance of this very simple idea that I would have to get in the elevator or it cannot take me to the tenth floor. It would be quite possible for a person standing on the outside to say, "I believe the elevator will take me to the tenth floor," and yet be standing right there in the lobby indefinitely. That person would never get to the tenth floor. There is one simple thing he would have to do: walk into the elevator.

If I want the favor of God, for instance in my financial situation, because I am in a situation where I need help, first of all I must believe that all things come from God. This means my money, too. Then I say to myself, so all I have in my possession is not really my own; it was given to me, and according to what the Scriptures teach it is to be used in the service of God.

Thus the faith, that all things come from God and really belong to Him, and that I am just a steward of these things, should be fulfilled, for example in my tithing my income. Because if I said I really believe I have all things from God, I could show that if I gave a tenth of it back to Him. My thanksgiving should be along this line. I should be thanking God for all things. My petitions should show concern, and in this way I could expect God to bless my financial situation. Does that seem heavy or rather complicated to you?

If I want the favor of God in my home, then I should accept my home as from God. The people who are in it are as from God. That is the case since God gave them to me, and gave me the privilege of being there. In that case faith in God could be fulfilled by praying for them. If I did not pray for them it would not seem much as though I had gotten them from God.

Then again I should treat my wife the way the Bible shows me to treat my wife. I should treat my children the way the Bible shows me to treat my children. I should treat my servants and my neighbors the way the Bible shows me. That would be fulfilling my faith in God. James goes on to say Abraham believed God, and that he put his faith into action when he offered up his son. If I say I believe in God I should stop and ask myself what am I offering up to God? In what actions of mine am I showing that I have faith in God?

Chapter 7

Do you understand how faith in God would affect daily conduct?

Faith generates confidence. In Acts 27:25 we are given an insight into something that happened when Paul was on a ship in a terrific storm at sea. In the midst of their panic Paul had taken charge more or less of the situation.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me (Acts 27:25).

This was a wonderful thing. If I have faith in God, I have a confident outlook on all of life. What should I believe first of all? Not only that God is, because the devils also believe that in fear and trembling, or that He is Almighty or that He is pure. The one thing that really links me with God and

makes me one of His believers is when I personally have in mind and accept as true that He gave His Son to die for me.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things (Romans 8:32)?

When Paul writes in this fashion he is laying the ground for complete and total confidence in God about anything and everything. The believer remembers that Almighty God spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, and joins with Paul in asking the question, "Shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (II Corinthians 5:14-15).

This is the fulfilling of my faith in Christ as my Savior. The believer has in mind, "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior; I believe that He died for me. I believe that I am purchased by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ." That means he belongs to Christ.

How can the believer put that into action? How can he fulfill that? He fulfills that by yielding to Christ as his Lord, turning himself over to Him. If he will do that, it will beget confidence in him. This will be strengthened in him as he reads further:

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:18- 22).

As surely as he acts in His will he knows he belongs to Him. As the believer belongs to God he can have every confidence in God. He can trust God at any time, anywhere, about everything, and about everybody.

Chapter 8

Do you think anybody could have faith in God?

Faith is available to all who will look to God.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth (Isaiah 45:22).
... him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

The implication always is that if anyone would come, he could be with Him. Thus it seems that believing is actually a form of coming to God. How shall one come? Does one not come to God when he turns his eyes upon Jesus and looks up into His wonderful face? Is this not what we mean by believing on Him? We say with the psalmist, "God is our refuge and strength." Now if you think of a shelter that people go to in times of storms, let me ask you, does a person have to qualify to come into that shelter in

the time of storm? Is not one of the features of a shelter that it is open to anybody, and whosoever will may come? Remember God is no respecter of persons. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." We realize that faith is not innate. We were not born with it. Nobody in this world was born with a confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is something you learn. But we do have capacity to believe it after we have learned it, and we can commit ourselves to it.

The reality of God is obvious.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork (Psalms 19:1).

The sovereignty of God is real, all around about us. We see it the way God has done it. The grace of God is wonderful. God is kind and merciful to those who put their trust in Him. We read:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Anybody can come at any time to Him.

I remember some years ago I had this experience. A woman, who had been a business woman in New York and had come back into the city where I lived, to be with her mother, called me on the telephone and made an appointment. When she came to see me, she said her mother wanted her to talk with me. I knew the problem would be something spiritual. So in a very short time in talking together we got to the point. The woman said simply, "I cannot believe." I kindly said to her as gently as I knew how, "Yes, you can believe." She said, "Why do you say I can believe?" I said, "Anybody can believe. It is done all the time." She said, "But I just can't. I have tried and I just can't. I just can't think of the things of God, and I can't think of the things of heaven and the things of the spiritual world. My heart just isn't open to those things. I just can't do it." We were standing close to a large mountain and thinking about it, I said to her, "Do you realize I could take you to within a half mile of that mountain in broad daylight and with your eyes open you would not be able to see it?" She just looked at me. I said, "Let me go over what I mean. In broad daylight I will take you within a half mile of that mountain with the sun shining and your eyes wide open, and you will not be able to see it." She thought a little longer. Then she turned to me and said, "Oh, you mean if I had my back turned!" I said, "Exactly. If you had your back turned you could not do it. But if you were to turn and look, you would see." The Lord Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life." It is not difficult. Whosoever will may come. Whosoever cometh He in no wise will cast out. Faith is available to all who come to Him.